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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0049
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000264

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DEPT FOR EUR/WE LARREA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2031
TAGS: [LE](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [SY](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: HOLY SEE ENVOY PROPOSAL ON HOLD

REF: A. VATICAN 253 ET AL.

[1](#)B. LARREA - EMBASSY VATICAN EMAIL

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CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Pol/Econ Chief, Vatican, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Holy See FM equivalent Mamberti told the Ambassador December 18 that the Vatican had decided to hold off on sending an envoy to Lebanon (ref a), saying that circumstances were not right for such a mission. In a separate conversation, a Vatican official implied that the Holy See was waiting to gauge reactions to the Arab League plan and did not want to upset a precarious balance by sending an envoy into the fray now. In a related development December 14, the pope received the credentials of the new Syrian ambassador to the Holy See. The Holy See made its point on Syrian policies on Lebanon publicly and privately. As reported previously, there is an internal struggle at the Vatican on how aggressive to be in its Middle East diplomacy. We recommend continued engagement with Archbishop Sambi in Washington, as we continue to work with the Holy See Secretariat of State here to tip the balance. End summary.

No Envoy for Now

[1](#)2. (C) Holy See Secretary for Relations with States (FM equivalent) Archbishop Dominique Mamberti told the Ambassador December 18 that the Vatican had decided to hold off on sending an envoy to Lebanon for the time being (ref a). Until the government is ready to compromise, he said, the Holy See now thinks an envoy would not be able to play a useful role. Mamberti also said that an envoy would not be able to manufacture unity among Christians in Lebanon. He said he was

under no illusions about General Aoun, and was particularly frustrated about the role he was playing in lending Hezbollah some credibility among Christians. He noted that the Holy See was continuing to work with the Nuncio and Patriarch to do what it could behind the scenes to help heal rifts within the Christian community. The Ambassador emphasized to Mamberti the seriousness of the situation in Lebanon and reiterated points we have made previously about the crucial role the Holy See could play, especially with regard to Aoun and Lahoud (ref b).

Arab League

13. (C) In a separate conversation December 18, the Vatican MFA's director for the Middle East, Monsignor Franco Coppola, told us that the Holy See was hopeful that the Arab League's plan for Lebanon would be helpful. He implied that the Holy See preferred to wait to see how reactions to this plan developed and did not want to upset a precarious balance by sending an envoy into the fray now.

Pope Makes Point to Syrian Ambassador

14. (C) In related developments, the pope received the credentials of Makram Obeid, the new Syrian ambassador to the Holy See, on December 14. High-ranking Vatican officials had told Ambassador Rooney that there had been a controversy within

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the Holy See Secretariat of State as to how tough to be on the Syrians - publicly and privately - about their destructive role in Lebanon and the region (ref b). In the end, in the context of Vatican diplomacy the pope's public statement [emailed to EUR/WE] was quite strong. The pope noted that he had "pleaded for a cessation of violence in Lebanon, in the Holy Land, and in Iraq-as innocent people continue to suffer and targeted individuals are kidnapped or assassinated."

15. (C) Coppola told us that the pope kept his private conversation diplomatic, but had made it clear to Ambassador Obeid that the Holy See saw Syria's influence in Lebanon as dangerous. Mamberti told the Ambassador that Cardinal Secretary of State Bertone went further in his meeting with Obeid, speaking strongly to him about Syria's role.

Comment

16. (C) As reported previously, there is an internal struggle at the Vatican on how aggressive to be in its Middle East diplomacy. Post believes we still have an opportunity to influence the Holy See to dive in deeper on Lebanon. We

recommend continued engagement with Archbishop Sambhi in Washington, as we continue to work with the Holy See Secretariat of State here. On the envoy issue, we feel there is still space to push back; we welcome specific points on the issue.

ROONEY